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## Perchlorate fix requires regional cooperation

Nell Soto  
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With all the news lately about the perchlorate lawsuit between Rialto and San Bernardino County, it is important that we not lose track of the big picture.

True, Rialto lost five wells to perchlorate contamination. But according to information from the water suppliers in the region, Colton lost three wells, West Valley Water District lost five, and Fontana Water Co. lost seven wells to perchlorate.

Perchlorate contamination is a problem for the entire region, and we all have to work together on the solution.

In the four years since I created the Inland Valley Perchlorate Task Force to tackle this problem, some progress has been made, but it hasn't been easy.

While each of the aforementioned communities or agencies has returned some wells to service with the installation of wellhead treatment systems, the money needed to pay for those systems has not been easy to come by.

About \$7 million of the funding has come from two sources. B.F. Goodrich, one of the polluters, offered an early "good faith" payment of \$4 million back in 2002, and the state Water Resources Control Board provided \$3 million in funds from its cleanup and abatement account.

That money helped a great deal, but we have much further to go. The federal government also has provided some money, and thanks to Sen. Dianne Feinstein, D-Calif., our area may be receiving even more federal dollars in the near future.

But one of the key principles that I continuously have expressed is that it must be the polluters who pay the cost of cleanup, not the water suppliers or their customers.

In line with that principle, I authored a state law in 2003 that clarified the power of the regional water quality control boards to force polluters to pay for the cleanup costs and provide replacement water.

Additional progress has been made by San Bernardino County, which reports that it has spent \$7 million to study perchlorate contamination coming from land it owns next to the Mid-Valley Landfill in Rialto. The county also has installed a series of wells and a treatment system intended to stop the flow of perchlorate south, threatening more wells.

But despite these signs of progress, not nearly enough has been done.

Some of our water suppliers have been forced to raise rates in order to pay for cost of treatment and of pursuing polluters. A recent white paper developed by the county and the four affected water suppliers indicates that the long-term costs of restoring the groundwater could be hundreds of millions of dollars.

It is gratifying to see Supervisor Josie Gonzales taking leadership on this issue for the county. She is correct when she calls for increased cooperation and less infighting among the water agencies, and she has acknowledged that the county landfill is one source of the problem (dating back to previous occupants). But we should remember that the perchlorate problem is bigger than any one agency, and that it is going to require cooperation and lots of hard work to resolve.

Inland Empire leaders have been told by both Republicans and Democrats in Washington, D.C., that we are more likely to get more federal funding if we - agencies and officials alike - speak with one voice.

I recently posed a challenge to Gov. Arnold Schwarzenegger's nominees to the Santa Ana Regional Water Quality Control Board, which has jurisdiction over our area, to take control of this regional crisis.

Actions speak louder than words, and the regional board has the authority to lift the burden off the backs of the ratepayers and water purveyors.

Nell Soto, D-Pomona, represents the Inland Empire in the state Senate.